

Jane Addams: Impact on Illinois

Brooke L. Langley
Washington Gifted School, Peoria
Teacher: Jurgia and J. Tracy Prescott

Have you ever wondered what life was like for many of your ancestors? Thanks to Jane Addams and her idea of the Hull House, life was good for many in the late 1800s and early 1900s. There was an empty spot inside of Jane Addams, and after visiting some of the less fortunate, she realized her calling. After years of feeling ugly and helpless, Addams met Ellen Starr, and together they thought up an idea to help the needy citizens. Together the women founded the Hull House, thus helping many Illinois citizens find hope in their daily lives. As a result of overwhelming immigration and trouble with the economy, Jane Addams founded the Hull House thus helping many immigrants find a home in Illinois and providing mothers, teens, and toddlers with special classes.

The key influence in Jane Addams' life was her father, John Huy Addams. The main reason that Jane Addams felt despair throughout her life was because of her father's death. Jane Addams once stated that her father was the one who incorporated her into "the moral concerns of life". Her first encounter with poverty was when she asked her father why people lived in awful houses so close together. After her father explained it to her, she replied that she would have a large house in the middle of all the small ones, which was later the Hull House. Most of the poverty and tough situations that Jane Addams saw, took place in Illinois which was also influential because she wanted to help mostly people in her home state. Meanwhile, Jane Addams visited a shelter for about sixteen old colored women, and also visited "a little colored orphan asylum." She discovered that she felt better after visiting one of the charities than she ever had after a

lecture or art exhibit with her school. This showed how much Jane Addams truly enjoyed spending time with the less fortunate and the people living at the home. Later Jane Addams visited East London and described her experience there as overwhelming with poverty which was inflicted upon the city. She also returned to Europe in late 1887 to visit Toynbee Hall, which was founded as the world's first settlement house. In June 1888, Jane Addams went back to Toynbee Hall, which later became the model for the Hull House. When she went, the people were so welcoming, and she found a home with them easily.

Jane Addams wanted to provide an environment as nice as the Toynbee Hall for her "settlement house." She wanted an environment where residents felt welcome and relaxed, instead of stressing about everything going on in their towns, cities, and states. Throughout her life, Jane Addams would say that there were many young men and women "whose uselessness hangs about them heavily," and who had led over-cultivated and undernourished lives. Jane Addams always felt that this description perfectly fit her, her life, and all of the events that took place within it. In fact, she also stated that these young men and women desperately needed something useful to do, but at the same time there was much that needed to be done to help those people trapped in poverty and cut off from culture.

Jane Addams and Ellen Starr met and became friends immediately. As soon as Jane Addams had shared her ideas of helping people with Ellen Starr the two were looking for a place to begin the Hull House because Ellen Starr also felt the need to serve the general public and help the needy. The ladies needed a large house with easy access, a peaceful atmosphere, and a location in the middle of several different cultures. This

search took a very long time; however, they finally found a house in a rundown neighborhood in Chicago, the city where the two had been staying together. They found this house one Sunday afternoon in the spring of 1889, on the corner of Halsted and Polk. Jane Addams and Ellen Starr investigated over the next several days, and the mansion was in an area of mostly foreign-born, working, poor people belonging to about thirty ethnic groups. The area had many parochial schools but very few public schools. Boys and girls as young as nine or ten spent their days instead, working in sweatshops and factories. The Hull House later helped these children by providing classes and helping the children get a better education. The house that they favored was in the nineteenth ward, one of the most impoverished and neglected of Chicago's thirty-four wards. After finally moving in, the Hull House became an institution offering educational, recreational, and other services to needy people.

After a long wait, the Hull House opened and had its first resident. Jane Addams described this 'first resident' as a older lady who read to listeners from Hawthorne. From then on the Hull House received guests from the womb all the way to their death beds. Each person in Chicago had a specific need that the Hull House could meet because of the imagination of Jane Addams and her work to make sure that everyone that came got an equal amount of service.

As a result of overwhelming immigration and trouble with the economy, Jane Addams founded the Hull House this helping many immigrants find a home in Illinois and providing mothers, teens, and toddlers with special classes. Jane Addams always stood up for what she believed and never cared what others thought, as long as her ideas were helping someone. Her idea for the Hull House sheltered many homeless and fed

those led to starvation. The house also gave wonderful classes to try and help educate the young minds in the country at that time, since many could not afford school. Jane Addams made a huge difference in the lives of many, including her own. She gave hope and courage to those who may have felt lost. [From About Jane Addams, 2001, The University of Illinois at Chicago, <<http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/newdesign/ja.html>>. (Sept. 21, 2008); Nicolle Bettis, Jane Addams 1860-1935; Women's Intellectual Contributions to the Study of Mind and Society, <<http://www.webster.edu/~woolfinjaneaddams.html#criticism>>. (Sept. 21, 2008); Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine*; Marshall W. Fishwick and Sam Welles, *Illustrious Americans*, 1968; Dennis B. Fradin and Judith B. Fradin, *Jane Addams*; James W. Linn, and Anne F. Scott, *Jane Addams*; and Cornella Meigs, *Jane Addams*.]